

Into the Darkness

Stories & Poems

SHABKHEZ

WORLD eBOOK LIBRARY EDITION

Contemporary Books and Poetry for the Independent Reader



BY The Three Twonks' Triangle

Hibah, Savez & Ibreez

& The Quartet of Add-ons

Zorez, Areez, Naukhez & Maiza

Dedicated
To
WRITING
&
To all those who taught us to Write



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FOREWORD

Sarusai Hiryu

Once upon a time, a poet wrote “An Apologie for poetry”.
Well, he succeeded in deserving the applause he accorded.
But now, here’s poetry – and prose - that genuinely needs to be
‘apologised’ for ... let us see how
the spiritual descendants of our renowned apologist fare...
Bon courage, mes ‘hypocrites lecteurs’.
Et bienvenu, mes ames sœurs

THE LAND OF THE LOST

Hibah Shabkhez

Come we will an the road is open,
Come we will an the door swings ajar,
The land we glimpsed longing from fens afar,
Shall now be ours to make or mar!

Unto the gate we shall be holpen,
There with ye forever spar.
Perish not, then; cry instead, "War! War! War!"
After, the doom lies no more in fist or star!

The land of clouds where suns rain down,
The land of roses where tulips are;
Land of the living where the dead croon,
Land of misery where joys scar!

Lady of our heart, bane of our soul!
Cradle of our carcasses, stinking hole!
Land of lightening, land of love!
Haunt of the eagle, refuge of the dove!

We come, O Land of the Lost!
We come in a trice, gauze bannered host,
War we shall, against thy woes,
With axe and hoe and thy own foes!

INTO THE DARKNESS

Hibah Shabkhez

It was a night typical of that region of Africa – starry, clear and bitterly cold. Few people were abroad at the witching hour in so small a town. Among such lights as were still to be seen, was a cracked neon signboard that flashed “CAFÉ BIDOLI” in bold bright letters. It was easily the best thing about the “café”, which consisted of a ramshackle shed with a termite-infested, discolored wooden door.

Inside the café, five boys, quite obviously foreign, were sprawled on rickety armchairs around a blazing fire. They ate and drank out of the chipped earthen utensils provided by the owner, and there was much jest and laughter all around.

Suddenly, the door was flung open. The icy gust that greeted the café put an abrupt end to the conversation. In the doorway stood a dark little man.

He wore the traditional African dress of white cotton, and a twelve-caped English greatcoat that was as ludicrous as it was incongruous. The most preposterous thing about him was his headgear – a structure so enormous that it absolutely dominated his diminutive frame. The old man seated himself in an armchair by the fire, totally ignoring the boys’ muttered ‘how’d you do’s. From the capacious pockets of his coat he extracted a strange-smelling package and began to consume its contents rapidly.

At length, having concluded his strange repast, he turned towards the boys with a quaint bow.

“Greetings, O foreign friends!” He intoned in a rumbling, ponderous fashion. His English was somewhat accented, but otherwise quite correct.

With ironic seriousness, the boys saluted him likewise

“You like my country, yes?” he demanded almost belligerently.

“We have not had the opportunity to see much of it, sir” said one of the boys courteously. “We arrived but yesterday.”

In his guttural, stentorian voice, the old man commenced an oration of such beauty regarding his native land that the boys listened spellbound. Young, restless, credulous and hungry for adventure as they were, each was possessed by a longing to see for himself the wonders he described.

“You come on a tour to see Africa. You roam the cities – you see people, and buildings and rubbish – much rubbish. Then you see the jungle. You sit in a lighted, roaring jeep that sends the animals scurrying away. Bah! *This* is no way to see Africa! Now I –” he paused to emphasize his next words.

“Now I am a dweller of this land, and for fifty summers have I roamed its jungles – by day and by night. I can show you the jungle as it should be seen - on foot, and in the dark. I could show you –” His voice dropped and became even more intense. “Sights that would make your blood curdle and send chills down your spines. I could show you leopards hunting deer scarcely three feet from your face; I could –” He stood up abruptly thrusting a crumpled piece of paper at them. His voice had suddenly become crisp and businesslike “If you are interested, gentlemen, you will find my address in there.” With a parting nod he walked deliberately out.

The next evening, the boys headed excitedly for the man’s address in a hired Land Cruiser. They were bubbling over with enthusiasm and felt no suspicion whatsoever regarding the character and motives of their guide; had, in fact, none of the reservations which would certainly have arisen in the minds of older and wiser men. Inexperienced and guileless as they were, the prospect of ‘adventure’ had filled up their minds to the exclusion of all else.

A few kilometers into the woods, they parked their jeep by the roadside. Then they headed off into the darkness. The dense canopy of trees above

blocked utterly the light of the stars and the faintly-simmering crescent. The dark, the cold, and the awful silence made them nervous and jittery, so that they jumped at every rustle. The tree-shadows looming ahead assumed such monstrous proportions; - the sinister, menacing aura permeating the forest had begun to play havoc with their imaginations. An odd, ominous foreboding held them in thrall.

The man halted. He began to howl - a shrill, hideous cry that froze them to the marrow. In growing horror they watched themselves being surrounded by little dark men, crouching with spears poised most menacingly. Behind them were even smaller women and children.

One of the boys suddenly saw something that made his heart leap to his throat. His eyes widened in shock as he saw a chubby-cheeked, pearl-toothed child comfortably gnawing what appeared to be - a human hand!

“Run!” he cried. “They’re *cannibals*”

Simultaneously, the boys broke through the massive human barrier and ran for their lives. However, their desperate effort was swiftly terminated - five spears went spinning after them on the instant. As the grisly messengers of death struck home, five screams rose as one to shatter the peace of the African Jungle.

A Story About An Evil Man

Maiza Shabkhez

Once upon a time there was a man. His name was Ahmad Kabir. He was an evil man. He killed a thousand people. He never stopped killing people. In the end the world was full of murderers.

The end.

GREED IS A CURSE

Areez Shabkhez

Many, many years ago, there lived a crotchety old miser in a tumbledown shack, who was as stupid as he was greedy. He never spent a single penny unless he had to, and he never lost a single opportunity of amassing more and more and still more wealth.

He had only one servant – a poor hunch-backed spindle-legged fellow who hardly ever received his meagre wages. One day, he tore his last shirt on a nail. Wringing his hands in despair, he went to his master.

“P-please, sir, may I have some money to buy a new shirt?”

“What?” cried the old miser. “You’ve torn the shirt I gave you only five years ago? Wretch! Dolt! Are you trying to eat me out of house and home? Eh? You shall pay for this, I tell you! You’ll get no money at all for the next six months!”

Grind the worm too hard into the earth and he does inevitably turn. The servant decided this was the last straw. If there was one thing he absolutely insisted on having, it was a shirt. He was seething with resentment at years and years of injustice, and he planned a truly spectacular revenge.

From an old history book he tore out a map, drew a dark red circle in the centre and labelled it ‘TREASURE’ in bold black capitals. Next morning, when he took the old miser his breakfast – half a slice of mouldy bread and brackish water in a rusty jug – he pretended to study the map secretly behind his master’s chair.

“What? What’s that?” demanded the miser, gnawing at his miserable toast. “It’s a plan to steal my money! Scoundrel!”

“N-no, no, sir!” stammered the servant. “It’s nothing, nothing at all ...”

“Bring it here! AT ONCE!” roared the miser, and the servant gave it to him with a very great show of reluctance.

“Aha!” said the miser jubilantly. “Treasure! And you wanted to hide it from me? My treasure, my precious treasure! I must have it!”

“Well,” said the servant, snatching away the map. “Give me my wages first, or I’ll put this paper – the key to the treasure – in the fire!”

“No! Please! Mercy!” Willy-nilly, moaning and groaning as he counted out each coin, the greedy old man gave him a million in exchange for the map.

Now this treasure obviously did not exist. The old miser was so blinded by his greed that he never even thought that the map might be a forgery. He sold his house, hired a hundred workers, and set out to look for the treasure.

“I’ll be the richest man in the world!” He gloated. “I’ll be so rich and powerful all the countries of the world will bow before ME! I will *rule* the world! Muhahaha! Muhahaha!”

“Start by buying yourself a new pair of trousers,” muttered the servant, as he left with his sacks of gold. “Stingy old wretch!”

While the greedy old man spent all his time and money searching for the non-existent treasure, the servant went to the City and set himself up in business. He became very rich.

In the middle of the African Jungles, all the old miser’s workers deserted him, because he refused to let them buy enough food and equipment.

“We ain’t eatin’ no more rotten bread!” They exploded. Then they put him in a crate and sent him all the way to Timbuktu.

But the old man went back. He kept on hunting for his precious treasure. In the end, he slipped on his torn trousers and died.

The old moral remains as true as ever: Greed is a curse.

MY CONFESSION PROVED TO BE A BLUNDER

Ibreez Shabkhez

Most students do not look forward to their result days. More specifically, they do not look forward to their report cards, and I was neither Dilton Doley nor Hermione Jean Granger.

Mathematics, especially ... the only thing about mathematics that I understood was that if it seemed easy, you were doing it wrong. On the other hand, my father found it easy as pie (not that he would have known how to make one). My Waterloo was his Austerlitz; my nemesis his forte and he did not like to hear any nonsense about the most important subject in the curriculum, as he put it often and vehemently.

Despite all my prayers there were no surprises; I stood first in English, third in Urdu and Islamiyat, and had marks well over eighty percent in the rest – there was exactly one exception to this pattern: Mathematics. On a bleach-white smudge of correction fluid was the figure in blue ball-pen, and under it, scored so heavily it had almost gone through the paper, was a blood-red line.

After careful reflection, I decided to show it to my mother first. She beamed at me when she saw English, smiled as she scanned the page – and then she froze, and her whole face puckered into frown-lines with pallid, stream-like trenches in between.

“Don’t you dare show it to your father for the next two weeks. He’s been exceedingly busy all month, and he’s bound to explode when he sees that red line at the bottom.”

Explode. Yes, she had put it quite accurately; the red would have much the same effect on him as it would on a drugged Spanish bull – obviously not a very desirable state of affairs.

Was it right, though, even at your mother's command, to hide such a thing from your father? Conscience, that meddlesome nuisance, hinted, sneered at the cowardice and the deceit, and inwardly I squirmed.

Being the eldest of my siblings, I had spent most of my childhood in the innocence that seems to be reserved for first-borns. They are the only children ever brought up inside that cocoon, and if you are not one of them yourself, it is surprisingly hard to imagine, let alone believe. I had, unlike most children of my age, plenty of qualms still about such routine, petty offenses as telling little lies, or swearing to false hoods in order to escape punishment. In fact, I was among those who are stamped invariably – and quite idoneously – as ‘Mummy Daddy Bachay’ (pampered babies).

My ideals were very much in place and most of my childish illusions were as yet unshattered. Until tenth grade, my library books, for instance, had always been Enid Blytons, and in that last year too I would have read ‘Amelia Jane’ stories and ‘Tales of Bimbo and Topsy’ with undiminished enjoyment, had it not been for the exams poised over my head like the sword of Damocles.

Something in my chest twisted, then it twisted a little more, then it twisted into a sort of knot and began in earnest to constrict my lungs. I felt a cold, uncomfortable sweat break out on my cheeks and the back of my neck. The heavy, precise footfalls were unmistakable.

I did not know how to lie. It simply was not the kind of thing your mother or teacher can teach you, and so I never had learnt to lie. Also, they said lying was more science than art, that it was mathematical –

The door swung open. The entire world slid back as I gazed in speechless terror at the wretched report card, but my mother hid it promptly and superbly, casually tucking it into the kitchen shelf along with the egg-beater she had been using.

“Amjad? Did you get it?” The manner in which he said it, with his square hand outstretched imperatively and his face firm and shut, made the question almost rhetorical.

I cracked ... I confessed.

My confession proved to be a blunder. When I had the best intentions ever, when I had told the whole truth, then I could indeed expect my father to forgive me, to soften at my honesty if nothing else! That was how it happened in all the good stories.

And was this a good story? The question is purely rhetorical ...

I was sent in disgrace to military school and now I am a second Lieutenant in the army. I survived by dousing every flicker of humanity or sentiment in rotgut whisky and smoking weed until I was no longer sure what two plus two meant, let alone that it equaled four. The last straw was that I refused to take a bribe and wink at a fraud that implicated my Commanding Officer. No, it was no heroic act of patriotism; the business was the veriest bagatelle, and any rational man would have shrugged and pocketed the money. But that irrepressible conscience of mine was once again my doom.

Now I am in jail, awaiting my court-martial. My mother comes to see me every week; the frown-lines have become permanent wrinkles, and the stream-like trenches in between are no longer dry.

My father never visits. He is a busy man ...

STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT

Areez Shabkhez

The King and Queen of Nakushita were reading a letter from Asad and Ali. The boys, who had come from the neighbouring Kingdom of Yfnca, had given them very useful information about its army and fortresses.

The King decided to invite them to his Palace. “We shall reward them right richly!” He declared. Ali was a little nervous, but Asad reassured him.

The King and Queen welcomed them warmly. Everyone showered compliments and presents upon them. Then the King took them to a secret meeting with his generals and chieftains.

Asad asked the King: “Sire, have the plans for destroying the enemy been completed?”

“My plans are going well,” said the King. He explained all his plans in detail, and Asad and Ali gave him apparently valuable suggestions. Then the friends went home, packed their bags and crossed the border to the Kingdom of Yfnca to tell their own King about the planned attack. It would provide Yfnca with the opportunity it needed to overwhelm and conquer Nakushita.

The King of Yfnca now had a chance, if he attacked quickly. The intrepid spies had done their work splendidly. But he thought that he could attack at any time he chose, so he did not hurry at all. Instead of preparing to meet the forces of Nakushita, he went on playing Foosball with his friends. So when the King of Nakushita did finally attack, Yfnca was defeated.

He forgot the most important principle of all: **STRIKE WHILE THE IRON IS HOT!**

QUOTES

Savez Shabkhez

I do not feel lonely when I am alone - I have my loneliness. Only when I'm surrounded by complete strangers do I feel alone.

There is only one thing worse than burning books and that is reading them.

I know we shouldn't expect anything in return for a good deed, but as an accountant I do believe in Contra entries.

Someone told me once: Having a boyfriend is just as good as having a girlfriend. I think they are right, in a way.

I have realized at last that it is impossible to find a book about teenagers without romance. I mean if you throw a lot of guys and girls together (of that age) something is bound to happen...unless they are all totally devoid of hormones. :)

Men need to strike a balance between falling in love with everyone and no one.

There is much more sense in biding your time and then creeping up on your enemy to kill him if he killed someone near to you, instead of running at him head on and getting shot. This is the fine line between wisdom, recklessness and cowardice one has to understand.

"Lol...jk" or simply "lol" in milder cases are miraculous healers on face book. Even if you insult a guy's whole family and then write a "lol...jk..." at the end u stand not only forgiven, but also appreciated. Humans are such weird creatures...

"Lol" is the most important punctuation mark of the 21st Century, to be used at the beginning and end of every sentence...lol.

Sometimes there is nothing so modern as a classic.

I would rather take the longer, more dangerous route than the shorter safer one.

True harmony with nature is not in the imprisonment of nature, but in the setting free of one's own spirit.

In the race of life we shouldn't slow down just because the ones in front of us have. Rather, we must speed up for we must overtake them to win.

Fiction is more real than non-fiction.

Perfection is only attained at the price of imperfection.

Lies are such beautiful things - they help us paint the world of our dreams.

Objective thinking: When the romantics realize that they are actually comparing their beloved to a rocky, gritty rugged terrain of nothingness (the moon).

You can't fall in love with somebody just because they would die without you.

Never lie to yourself. To the world, by all means.

Mankind needs to know the penalty before following a rule.

Nowadays people don't have solid-black and white personalities. Rather they are like abstract paintings- showing a little of every colour the world has spilt on them.

Life can't be an illusion. It's just way too painful for that.

Life has taught me two things; one that I'm a genius and two: that I'm extremely humble about it.

TEACHERS

Ibreez Shabkhez

My son, Inzamam, was only yesterday, beaten up by his teacher, his English teacher, for disturbing the class. I am sure he will not do it again because he is DEAD.

This is but a taste of the merciless and barbaric treatment children as young as five receive from their Spiritual parents who consider it their duty to suck their spirit out as quickly as possible. Such is the wrath of the TEACHERS!

Today, I met a hunchback in the street and asked him how he had become a hunchback. He told me that he had been a perfectly normal and healthy boy until he started going to school. Then his teacher had, one day, beaten him, while he was in traditional Cock position, with a bamboo stick...a nice fat one.

Is this the price of discipline? Do our teachers have the right to inflict such damage on the tender bodies of innocent children? The oppressors themselves cannot withstand the torture they subject the youth of tomorrow to and if the future generation is to face the world hunchbacked because of a few eccentrics whose terrorism goes unchecked and unquestioned then I believe it is time to challenge these exorcists who dampen the spirits and clip the wings of angels; very often a leg or two is clipped.

In such children, confidence is often lacking and are effected by it to such a degree that they do not even dare to offer their opinion in class if it happens to differ from the teacher's, and hence, learning is restricted and questions are forbidden. A question is seen as a challenge to the teacher's knowledge; which isn't much anyway.

In this age of modernisation darkness still prevails, cruelty dominates and evil still reigns...

AN INFORMAL LETTER

Zorez Shabkhez

Write, using Standard English, a letter to an elderly relative who resides abroad, describing a picnic you enjoyed on a recent visit to the interior of the island where you live. Use the notes below, and add your own ideas so that the letter is interesting to read.

- Journey by car to high plateau
- Site found/ food prepared
- Sudden happening
- Reactions of various people
- Weather change
- Homeward bound

Dear Unknown,

“Kaisa hai bhai!”

How are you, dude! I am doing great here on Isla Nublar and hope you are doing just fine at your end. I mean, it was quite hard getting onto the island as there are a lot of dinosaurs wandering around here. You are still alive on Isla Sorna, are you not? Let me tell you how much trouble it was just getting there. Isla Nublar is basically an island tacked onto an island; the island on which I live is connected to it. I started my journey in a car which when I got to the Island was crushed by a tyrannosaurus. After that I started on foot. There was a man on every dinosaur I saw. Whenever a dinosaur tried to hit me the man whacked it a bit and it stopped. After a while I got too tired and stopped. I fell asleep.

When I woke up there were three dinosaurs sitting in front of me and one man was standing beside each. Their faces were full of surprise when I opened my bundle to have a drink. I asked them the reason and got it instantly: it seemed that they had never eaten such food.

I saw their hunger and decided on a picnic. In return one of them offered me a dinosaur ride. This was perhaps not a good idea as by the time we had reached a decent spot I had a leg broken and both eyes swollen.

We sat down. I spread my food on the floor as that was what was considered decent over there. I would not call it a 'picnic' but a 'dinosaur picnic' as the dinosaurs ate it all up. I came back with the help of a 'dinosaur man' and I am glad now that I finally found out what a real dinosaur looks like.

Hope you are not accompanied by a dinosaur back at Isla Sorna. I am waiting for your stories.

Your Friend,
Zorez Shabkhez

MY FAVOURITE THINGS

Naukhez Shabkhez

SHARK

Big, scary
Swimming, eating, drinking
My favourite sea animal
Animal

MANGO

Yellow, delicious
Biting, Munching, enjoying
My favourite fruit
Fruit

CAMEL

Long, tall
Eats, walks, enjoys
My favourite desert animal
Animal

FAKE FRIENDZ

Ibreez Shabkhez

I talked to you
Shared your tears
We began to woo
Our greatest fears

Grief brought all to an end
You turned into a fiendish friend
Kissing your sorrow into me
Drowned my happiness in the sea

You are a fake
A heartless rake
A soulless philanderer
A shallow lake

SPRING

Savez Shabkhez

**When the trees sway to and fro in the breeze
When you don't feel hot and don't freeze**

**When the plants look fresh all day
And in the park you want to stay**

**You want to have a park of your own
And do not bother to receive the phone**

**When the flowers are bright and gay
Like beautiful Morgan le Fay**

**When there is a lovely smell about
And nobody wishes to shout**

**When the clouds are not there
And everything is fair**

**When the children are always in the park
And upon high boughs sings the joyous lark**

**When the children have rosy cheeks
And their friends don't call them freaks**

**When the ground is covered with a mat of new grass
And the dewdrops are shining like glass**

**When the sun is not shining brightly
And the breeze is moving lightly**

**When the wind is making its soft moaning noise
And children fret no more over silly toys**

**When clouds burst rarely
And the sun is hot – barely**

**'Tis one of the seasons God has made
But sad to tell after a while it does fade.**

BEGGARS

Savez Shabkhez

Begging in the scorching heat,
Their hands extended,
Their faces beseeching,
Asking for something to eat.

A young boy sleeping on the ground,
Awakens and dons his sodden rags,
Ignoring the rumblings in his stomach,
Towards the road, his feet he drags.

His rags are covered in filth,
His eyes swimming with tears,
He walks towards the road,
Ignoring the children's taunting leers.

He approaches a car on his protesting feet,
As if in a trance,
The light turns green, the car drives off,
Without a backward glance

He stands where he is,
Not caring about his health,
Wondering about,
The secrets of wealth.

Calling it a day,
On the pavement he lies,
Hoping that,
He dies, dies, dies.

INNOCENCE

Hibah & Savez Shabkhez

Tears mingled with sweat as it rolled down Jim's face. He emptied his shovel with another violent jerk, and dug it viciously into the heart of the earth.

Ordinarily, there was not a pleasanter fellow to be found in all England. Jim Donovan was wont to sing and whistle as he worked, and ever had a merry word for a passer-by. But today his face was hard and grim, and when he did break into speech, he swore – in a raspy cracked voice that had in it a scarcely suppressed sob.

Now and then he would break off to glare with burning hatred at the gables of the mansion half hidden by a lofty grove of ash-trees that swayed majestically with the breeze. He cursed as he looked, cursed, with bitter, searing anguish the man who owned it, his landlord - Lord Algernon Rutherford, Duke of Sale.

His heart seemed like to burst as the memories washed over him again. Himself kneeling and crying before the Duke, begging for his help; ... His Grace, indifferent, languid, lips curling in disdainful hauteur as he ordered the servants to drag Jim out; and the wan and wasted features of his dying daughter ... A face once plump and rosy ... his merry, bright-eyed little Lucy ... He writhed anew in the utter helplessness that had engulfed him as she lay languishing and dying. Dying ... and all for want of a little money.

He moaned aloud as her face rose afresh before him, and the impotent rage in his heart rose again to a veritable tempest. He screamed another curse at the sun-warmed gables as he began to dig again, faster and yet more ferociously.

The patter of light, childish feet arrested his attention. He forced apart the thorny hedge in front of him and stood staring down into the clearing, wondering who it was that came.

His heart leapt to his throat. A little girl - a child barely six, with flaxen curls and sea- blue laughing eyes... She came running out of the trees, chattering gaily to her weary nursemaid.

His heart raced as he devoured her with his eyes. For an instant of fey joy, he had almost believed he beheld his own Lucy, for the child had her hair, her eyes, even her tinkling laugh. The appearance of the nursemaid, however, made him realize who the girl must be.

“*His* daughter –” he thought, and suddenly revulsion and hatred rose up in him, so that he longed to strike her down – felt a savage, absolutely animal desire to maul – to kill her.

Wrenching himself away, Jim compelled hands trembling with rage to gouge out more of the rich red earth. Over and over again as he stabbed as though it was in truth his hated foe he smote.

The loud baying of hounds from the road drew involuntarily his gaze. He realized at once that it was the hunt coming home, the tireless dogs well ahead of the huntsmen cantering leisurely to their dinner. The horsemen were only dimly visible yet, but the leaping, snarling hounds, still aquiver with the excitement of the chase, tore madly across the fields. Obedient no more to their masters’ shouts, they were running right through the gardens to the grove ... they were heading straight for the girl!

He felt gloating, exulting triumph as he watched them draw closer to the baby, who cooed and gurgled over her posies in blissful ignorance of all else. Her nursemaid sat nearby, her back to a lichen-smoothed tree-trunk. She was fast asleep.

“Providence!” he hissed. “Providence has undertaken my vengeance, Duke! Now thy daughter will die as mine did, in agony unrelieved!”

The dogs’ growls grew louder and wilder as Jim watched them closing in for the kill with an eager expectation that peaked anew with every deep-drawn breath. Still she stood there, entirely oblivious, warbling and twiddling her jasmine.

As he watched her, a new emotion – an emotion almost drowned at first by his blind hatred - began to vie with the bitter triumph and desire for vengeance raging in his breast.

“The child is Innocent; she does not deserve this gruesome end!” spake his better self - but his grief, astringent and vindictive, was stronger; it persisted – “She is his daughter, his daughter ... she pays for his Crime ... for my little Lucy”

“She is a guileless child!” insisted his better nature.

He was rooted to the spot, his mind a whirl of confused, conflicting impulses battling for ascendancy. He could try to save her – or he could satiate his charred heart by watching her being torn apart by the fearsome hounds. No one would ever know he had been there...

As the hounds crossed into the clearing, the child looked up at last. With a terrified scream she began to run homewards, wailing distractedly.

The child’s scream stabbed Jim’s heart like a dagger thrust in to the hilt. In that instant, he knew he could not – would not let a child die and stand by unmoved

He jumped into the clearing and scooped her up in one swift, fluid motion. Even as he began to run the massive bulldog nearest him sank his fangs into Jim’s bare ankle.

Jim held the shrieking child clasped to his chest as he fell, shielding her with his body. He lashed out with his shovel, and felled his first antagonist, but the rest of the pack was on him ere he could pull to his maimed feet. With a desperate leap Jim gained the nearest tree-trunk. Planting his back to it and holding the child high on his shoulder he could fend off the dogs awhile, protract the struggle – unless aid came swiftly, however, there was not much doubt of the end. Already he was dizzy with pain and copious blood loss, and though he fought with all his might he knew it would not be long before he collapsed.

The commotion had woken the nurse, who had run back to the house weeping and shrieking hysterically. Soon a dozen servants were running

back with her, armed with sticks, stones, rakes, guns, whips – anything and everything they could find.

As for Lord Algernon Rutherford - ever languid, invariably composed, the finest embodiment of cynical dandyism the *haut monde* had been favoured with - very few of his most fervent admirers would have recognized that Tulip of Fashion just then. Wig askew, boots scratched and splattered with mud, his beautiful dove-coloured coat and satin breeches ripped and dragged a hundred ways by the thorns and brambles, he scrambled through the trees and bushes, crying “Gerty!-Gerty!” at the top of his voice.

With his daughter clutched to his breast, he turned with brimming eyes to her preserver. Lord Algernon Rutherford, Duke of Sale, stood staring in dawning shame and wonder at the wounded and bleeding body of Jim Donovan, peasant- the man whose daughter he had killed.

CAT

Naukhez Shabkhez

I tamed a cat two years ago
She was trained to throw an arrow from a bow

She was so fat
And was a very big brat

She liked to eat cat food
And was always in her own mood

At first she liked to eat mice
But now she likes to eat chicken, fish and drink milk

She is my cat and
I love her very much

EVIL AND HUMANS

Savez Shabkhez

It's weird: Cruelty. Humans inflicting misery on humans. If someone killed your father you would feel a certain degree of grief. You would probably want revenge. Knowing this, how can men kill thousands of humans each day? It seems impossible. I cannot, must not believe it. Evil cannot exist.

Think about it. The other day, I saw a photo of an American political figure with his family. Underneath, there was a photo of a family dying. Impossible.

He killed them and still had the heart to hug his own children. I wonder what he tells them; Oh I kill people all around the world for fun: women and children and men...oh and I love you. If you had been born in the East I would've killed you.

It's incredible. How can any human do it? My argument is not limited to America. I talk of humanity ... right down to bullying. You hit a kid, just because he's there. He's a human damn it! Try wounding someone in cold blood and you'll see what I mean. It's an act repugnant to humanity, but then humans are never humane.

A rather grim irony.

I have but one question: WHEN DID YOU FORSAKE YOURSELVES?

A child will never do such a thing. He is taught inhumanity...and there comes a time when his pride strips him of all humanity. A point when he forsakes himself and his humanity, plundering and looting without cause or conscience.

I couldn't believe in EVIL when I was younger. I never could hurt anybody ... it seemed so perfectly unnatural. Now I don't know what to think. No human could hurt another if he were in his right mind. Damn it!

Ikazi's reward

Naukhez Shabkhez

It was mid winter when Mr. Ikazi was having tea with Mrs. Ikazi his wife. Suddenly Mrs. Ikazi said “You don’t have any job and it’s time you got one we are very poor”.

He said he could not find any. So when it was dinner time he went to the baker’s shop to buy dinner but when he reached there he saw a paper pasted on the wall. It said “Anyone interested in getting a job? Here is one: you can take the food to the customers’ houses and you will be well paid. Bakery.”

Mr Ikazi was overjoyed and ran back to his wife and discussed the matter and accepted the job. The first day nothing went wrong but he got tired of walking so he thought he would buy a bicycle but the bicycle was too expensive .so he bought an old ruined bicycle which could carry his weight and the food. But the next day when he delivered the last item and left to go home, he saw two cycles where he had left his own. He did not look very carefully. He just chose one and went home.

Accidently he chose the wrong one. When its owner came he could not find his own cycle he called the police .They said they would find the thief. When Mr. Ikazi reached home he parked the cycle outside the shed and went in. When the police was crossing the street outside, they saw the bike and knew it was the stolen one.

They went there and asked him. He told them what had happened after he had bought the bike, and the police was certain it was him, as they had figured it out. The man came running and suddenly tripped over. His mask came off and the policeman recognized him and knew that he was the one who had stolen the bicycle a few years back. They arrested him.

Mr. Ikazi said: “Aha! Got you! There, you see, it was all part of my plan.” So he got a reward and he and his wife lived happily ever after.

EARTHQUAKE

Hibah Shabkhez

The sun strode briskly towards its zenith as it always did in the fall, something of the warmth of summer emanating from it still. Farmers welcomed it from their fields with hasty glances at the lush verdure it drew from the obscurity of night to glowing, radiant life, women peered at it out of their houses and dairies, children sang joyously to it as they raced up and down the twisting, winding mountains to their shabby school-house.

In the serene hamlet of Balakot, another day was drawing steadily on. A day like any other, eighth of an October akin to Octobers that had been and Octobers that stretched out before them in a vista of similarly placid years . Until " until the earth itself began to stir, to tremble beneath their feet like some gigantic monster goaded to wrath, began to fling them about and batter them, crush them under the rubble of their own beloved homes, maim and torture and engulf them altogether.

THE SAD DRAGON

Maiza Shabkhez

Once upon a time there was a dragon .He was sad and lonely. He lived in a cave. He did not have any friends. Near the cave was a forest in which animals lived. One day the dragon went out. He met a cat. The cat gave him some food and they became friends.

INNOCENCE...

Savez Shabkhez

Beads of perspiration rolled down Julian's face as he gave the shovel another enormous jerk, sending mounds of dirt flying.

Normally, he would've been thinking of the coming day's miseries or ways of pleasing his landlord to earn some extra money. Today, he was devastated, devastated by the death of his only child, Lucy. She had spent hardly a year in this world of men when she had died of illness, called back to her Lord.

Julian swore; long and fluently and a few birds singing nearby flew away. He cursed the landlord for it was he who had brought this misery upon him. The days events flew through his mind; the snarling landlord refusing him medical aid, his own person kneeling and crying before the landlord and his daughter's pale countenance. Julian was already beginning to feel weak at the knees; about to dissolve into tears again, when a rustle in the grass distracted him.

Wearily Julian glanced over his shoulder, to locate the source of the disturbance. His eyes fell on a little girl playing in the grass near the edge of the field; being supervised by the landlady and two maids. The landlord's daughter, he thought bitterly. She reminded him of his own daughter and refreshed the loss in his mind. A sudden unprecedented feeling of hate rose up in him demanding the death of the little girl. Julian's own daughter had been killed by that accursed landlord, why should his daughter live. The landlord would be made to feel the pain he was experiencing, the pain of a loved one dead. He took a step towards his target, anger mounting.

Julian's sharp ear's pricked to the sound of sounds not very far away. They were barking madly, seemingly excited about something. He spotted the landlord's hounds tearing across the field heading straight for the girl.

Providence, he thought had brought the hounds here. Now he would have his revenge upon the landlord. Feeling himself avenged, he leant on the shovel to witness the scene with satisfaction and a sort of savage pleasure. The hounds drew closer now aware of the girl's presence. A second feeling rose up in him as he watched her twiddling a jasmine in her hands, oblivious to the oncoming danger. A sudden concern for the girl's life made Julian take a second step towards her. After all it was the landlord's fault that his daughter was lying dead at home and not of this innocent, clueless little girl. Julian was engaged in a fierce mental battle; on one side was his grief which rooted him to the spot and on the other were his nature and the girl's innocence.

The landlady was shouting hysterically, the maids hopping around helplessly. Julian could've stood there and watched the little girl die; no could see him amidst the tall sugarcane. His nature won. Julian rushed towards the landlord's daughter, shovel raised. In one fluent motion he scooped up the girl in his arms and ran for the edge of the field. The hound caretakers were rushing to catch the hounds. One of the hounds, a massive Bulldog, was almost upon her. With one swing of his shovel he brought the hound to the ground writhing in agony. He dropped the shovel and ran towards the landlady, the hounds still in hot pursuit. As he reached the edge of the field one of the hounds collided into him. He fell down making sure that the girl remained unhurt. Julian's lips curved into a smile as he watched the child crawl into her mother's thankful arms. With the smile of content still etched on his face his eyes rolled into oblivion as the injured hound collapsed on top of him.

THE GOOD DIE YOUNG

Hibah Shabkhez

“Day is forever gone; the sun sets to rise no more,” he sighed, gazing wearily at the darkening sky. “Night, eternal night; starlit and yet starless; ... blank...empty...”

He bowed his head again over the grey-white marble.

Stone. Cold implacable stone that would not yield the sight his tear-drenched eyes thirsted for - that hid the lifeless form of his Lisbet. The freshly-carved inscription gleamed in the fading twilight, but he had no need to read it; it was branded on every fibre of his heart... for the thousandth time he muttered it:

“Elizabeth Kathleen O’Ryan nee O’Connell

b. 1980 d. 2005

‘The good die young’

“The good die young – the good die young,” He repeated the futile, age-old platitude again and again, staring at the stone as though he would wear it through with the very intensity of his anguish – he fell to his knees, tears cascading down his cheeks - he knelt there and wept, wept with utter, hopeless abandon.

Nathan could not accept it. He had heard often enough of people being struck down in the very prime of life, but surely - not his Lisbet! His princess, his queen, his darling... No. Not Lisbet. Sparkling with health and beauty and joy, glowing and vital ...

He could see her vividly... Radiant, beautiful, her fecund dark eyes alight with laughter as she laughed uproariously at his clowning. One second she had stood in the doorway, waving him goodbye – In a thunderbolt she had fallen insensible into his arms... Even as he shouted wildly for help, the serene pallor of her face told him it was all useless; that nothing on earth could avail her now ...

“Heart attack.” Doctor Armstrong had declared. “Entirely unexplained. I’m sorry, Nathan. There was nothing I could do-” his voice stuck in his throat and he was compelled to turn his face partly aside. As the family doctor of both the O’Connells and their neighbors the O’Ryans he had known Lisbet all her life. He had been genuinely fond of her, and the tragedy affected him profoundly.

But Nathan was blind and deaf to any grief but his own. Stunned disbelief had given way to desperate, panicked, hysterical denial. He broke free of his anxious relatives with animal ferocity; he refused all consolation. He would haunt the graveyard day and night, longing, praying, and waiting ... waiting.

It was incredible, impossible that he would never to see Lisbet again, that such ardent life, such flashing vivacity had become mere stone. There just had to be some way of reaching her, of seeing her again, even if was just once; was only for last look, one burning embrace..

The bewildered children had been whisked off by his sister as soon as the funeral was over. They had clung to their father, but Nathan’s only feeling at seeing them go had been relief. The frightened, puzzled faces of his daughters, the incessant wailing of his little son for his ‘mommy’ had cut him to the heart. How could he console them, who was himself desolate; how could he explain that which he could not fathom?

As he stood lost in his memories, in all the moments of tenderness they had shared in sweet content, he remembered also the tales of love and death they had read together, and at long last he felt he knew the answer. The only answer, the answer all true lovers through the ages had found ... Kneeling before her grave he held the dagger to his throat, and smiled as he closed his eyes.

Pearl-white laced with simmering wild-rose pink her gown fluttered in the breeze, her auburn curls rippling over her slender shoulders...With a wordless cry he bounded to his feet, arms outstretched; but she stood motionless, a world of gentle reproach in her eyes.

“And my children, Nathan?” The echo-like voice wrung from him an anguished sob. “What of my children?”

The knife fell with a loud clatter on the impassive marble. Even as great, tearing sobs racked his emaciated frame he finally understood and accepted the full measure of his burden. Not for him was such blissful escape from the lifelong misery; he must learn to live without her, to laugh without her, for the sake of her- their- children. Only then could he find peace in death.

He prayed for strength, for courage such as hers had been, fervently if rather incoherently. When he rose and wended his way home, the gentle spring breeze blew on him whence she had stood, soothing him as a healing balm, tranquilizing his shaking body and steadying his wavering steps. His heart swelled with determination and a sense of purpose.

Many decades later, an old, spent, but contented man, he died. His deathbed was surrounded by loving children and grandchildren, but his thoughts dwelt only one shining face, one sweet smile that was bright as ever...

“I’m coming, Lisbet,” He whispered. A peaceful smile lit his face as his spirit flew to join his beloved in death.

A Story About My Class Fellow

Maiza Shabkhez

Once upon a time there was a girl. Her name was Naz Fatima. She was very good at studies but she was very naughty. She wandered around the classroom. When the teacher shouted at her she sat down on her chair. In the end, at home time, she went home with her father.

NIGHT

Savez Shabkhez

The hawk spreads its wings
And soars into the sky
In the throat of the lark
The gentle note dies

Flitting through the trees
A deadly game of tag
Their shadows follow
With a slight, unpleasant lag

Time stands still
A deathly trance
Nature watches transfixed
Their mortal dance

A scream pierces the air, and the heavens weep
The devil laughs loud and long.
The winds howl, the oceans roar.
An eerie swan song.

The spirit moves on
Its work is done.
Light is past
And darkness begun.

HYPOCRISY

Savez Shabkhez

"People don't have solid-black and white personalities. Rather they are like abstract paintings- showing a little of every colour the world has spilt on them.

Anyway I was wondering the other day on it again and ran into a few things; double faces, converted personalities and convenience...which I'll discuss later.

We all behave differently in front of different people; polite to our boss, obedient to dad, vulgar with friends, etc.. Day after day we rehearse these roles forming sides to personalities and eventually different personalities. We forget to discover our real self and dissolve into those fake multiple identities...

And then age makes us accept them and the world and it's norms as they stand - without question. And eventually we all die, not knowing each other or ourselves. Never really knowing, what everything meant to us and what we should've done.

The ones who accept, I term as converted personalities...blockheads. The rest are just confused, and of course - convenience...

This is a pretty broad subject as far as discussion goes. People will believe in anything convenient, or set aside principles for ease and comfort. I wonder how they do it. It sickens me. Though I do it too, sometimes :)

This convenience extends to using common practice as a defense to religion, morals, ethics etc.

For example skipping prayer to play football. You know it's wrong. You still do it. The only answer is a "It's my business" or a shrug. Heck, I

really can't figure this out. Convenience again and a bit of people pressure.

It is shameful, it seems, to step a foot out of line from the norms. Even though u know what's right and norms suck. It's a little larger than peer pressure, its world pressure.

So. For me, I just hope I can control myself better.

THE BURROW

Ibreez Shabkhez

'Tis in luxury Thou liveth
Yet, not a penny 'tis Thou giveth
Thy share is naught but sorrow
For that day and its morrow

In death thy wealth wilt finish
Thy light and lust diminish
'Tis sin Thou dost borrow
For this day and the morrow

When the mighty bugle is blown
'Tis in hell Thou wilt be thrown
Thy soul a mere furrow
Within the fiery burrow

SLOW DOWN

Hibah Shabkhez

“Slow down! Slowdown! I’m scared!” The boy clung to his waist as the bike shrieked and skidded through the deserted streets. He let forth a yell of pure glee as they raced over the speed breaker.

“Rafay! Stop!” Ali sounded close to tears.

Rafay laughed. “Whoa, chill! Just relax and enjoy! Nothing’s gonna –”

Crash. He felt rather than saw the huge truck that leapt at them as they rounded the bend. The steel frame crumpled and cracked like aluminum foil. The impact jerked him forward, smashing his head into the bonnet. Even as he pulled himself off, gasping for breath, he saw Ali pitched over his head in a grotesque half-somersault. As he crashed into the wind screen, it broke. Bleeding copiously, he rolled off into the muddy road.

The truck driver did not linger. While Ali was still in the air, he had already started up his engine; by the time Rafay had managed to collect his wits, he was long gone.

For a long time Rafay just stood there, totally stunned. It was the pain that forced him back to reality, the pain from the gash – sharp and stabbing, and a nameless ache in his heart that wrenched and tore at him.

Trying to stem the blood from his head, Rafay groped for his mobile. It had been smashed to smithereens. He stood over his cousin’s body, staring blankly at his limp form, clutching the broken pieces as though they could somehow aid him still. A wave of terror washed over him, tightening still further the knot in his chest.

“I’ve got to do something!” He thought fighting the despair that well-nigh overwhelmed him. “But what? What?” He looked to the road again and again, but in his heart he knew he could not expect the help he

needed. Few people were likely to be abroad at three in the morning, and even fewer would actually stop to assist him.

“But if I don’t do any thing he will – NO!” Frantic, he drove the thought from his mind, forced himself to thinking instead of a way out

Shivering uncontrollably, he pulled off his jacket and the shirt beneath. Restoring the jacket, he tore the linen into strips with his teeth. His bandaging was rough and clumsy, but it served its purpose; the pool of blood at his feet grew no more. Then he bandaged his own wound.

But Rafay knew full well – though he refused to admit it even to himself - that Ali would die if he did not get to a hospital soon. He knelt down beside Ali and crossed his arms across his chest. Then he used the remaining linen to lash them securely together. Then he hoisted him onto his back, and used the broken bike as a support. Ignoring his protesting back, he began to walk.

They simply stared at him, their faces ash-white. He stood silent, his head bowed, not daring to meet their eyes. Then, his movements abrupt and uncoordinated as a zombie’s, Uncle Hassan pushed open the door and went out into the yard. Aunt Alizay followed, her face hidden in her bony hands. Rafay collapsed onto the sofa,

Remorse – remorse was the thing that gnawed at him – remorse and fear. “They trusted you and you failed them!” he tried to deny it, to push the thought from his mind, but he could not.

“Ali, don’t die! Please don’t die!” It was a hoarse, beseeching whisper “Dear Allah, please don’t let him die ... I’ll never do it again, I’ll ...” The words came tumbling out of his mouth, slurred and incoherent. Tears ran down his cheeks, and his breath came in great, gasping sobs.

The sun rose in the east, its gentle glow suffusing the world with warmth. But Rafay, his head buried in the sofa still, was entirely oblivious.

The sound of the gate being opened made him start to his feet.
Trembling from head to foot, he flung open the door.

Their beaming faces told him everything he needed to know.

BROKEN...

Savez Shabkhez

I hang upon a tree

A veiled cocoon

Dreaming my dreams

Scared by my nightmares

I try to speak, and the world stifles me

I try to breathe and the world suffocates me

I try to protest and the world breaks me

And I lie upon the ground

A shattered chrysalis

Soulless.

UNTITLED...

Savez Shabkhez

I take a state of mind and illustrate it with incidents. This is just one of those stories.

Even the wind was dead. The trees had long stopped swaying in the breeze; their comforting rustle faded slowly into a deafening silence.

A Divine silence...

Just Anam and I, sitting on a meager tuft of grass- she deserved better. Better than this, better than me ... I was neglecting her, ignoring her. I was worse than a selfish cat- an ungrateful brother.

She was my only comfort. She stuck to me like a burr, trotting after me with her soft smile, radiant if I stopped for a second to smile back. A touch of her gentle hand would soothe away all the trouble in my heart.

Anam reached hesitatingly out to me and gave my burning hand a slight squeeze. I responded to the pressure of her fingers, but I could dismiss the ugly fact no longer.

We were motherless.

Not merely orphans, as other children were, with memories and stories of their mothers to lull them into sweet dreams. There were not even pictures of her in the house, or any letters...it was like she had never been here at all.

An eternal vacuum...

I needed to know where she was, whether she was severed from us forever, or whether she lived still ... and if so, why she had chosen thus to abandon us? Why did my cheeks lack the rosiness, my eyes the complacent self-assurance of those blessed with a mother's caresses? I needed to know.

“Anam, we are leaving.” My voice was uncharacteristically harsh. Anam was building a little house of clay, but she did not argue. Not her. She knew I was upset and she would do nothing to aggravate me. Her own face was sad and serious as she stood up, and her eyes brimmed suddenly with sympathetic tears.

The perfect angel...

My father interpreted my countenance to perfection “he always did read me like an open book. Suddenly, he looked an old man; a sort of resignation crossed his face as I planted myself resolutely in front of him.

Anam had tiptoed up the stairs to her room. I was glad; for all her sweet seriousness she was little more than a baby.

“You want to know why you don’t have a mother, don’t you?” he said softly.

I remained silent, offering no answer to this assumption except the slightest of grim nods. He carried on with another sigh.

“Well Raza, I think it is time I told you. For the past six years I have been trying ” but I was always too much of a coward ... It was so easy just to keep on hiding it, instead of ” here. Look at this.”

He extracted a highly folded, yellowing envelope out of his breast pocket. My clammy hands grasped it desperately.

It was a photograph. Through the faded card Anam’s eyes twinkled at me from the pretty young face that had to belong to ... my mother? I raised my head. Father nodded. We looked away hastily, unable to look long into each other’s tearful eyes. Shaking his head, he began.

“Let me tell you a story. Your mother’s story. A warrior’s story. One summer morning, while you and I to your Uncle’s house, people from a neighbouring village raided our little hamlet. It was an old family feud between the landlords - we had nothing to do with it. It was an enmity

passed down through the generations. It is like war; the common people just get caught up in the fighting. Innocent, defenseless and helpless people. That's how it is."

"What happened? How did Anam and I survive? Why didn't she escape like us?" I needed answers, though I was not sure now that I would not regret it.

"Your mother was a determined and courageous woman. When the villains attacked our house she hid Anam. She could have tried escaping with Anam, but it might have cost both their lives. She could not bear the thought of Anam dying. All the odds were against her, but she never gave in."

I was so glad my mother didn't give up, that she had been courageous and noble "a true ideal of motherhood. She had provided me my only comfort in life. Anam. I could not bear the thought of life without Anam. As I trudged up the stairs to my room, Anam ran out from her hiding place (she had been listening all the time) and hugged me. I clutched her to my chest and silently thanked Mother for her priceless gift...

SUPER POWERS WAR MONGERS

Savez Shabkhez

Once in a corner of this dear earth,
A threesome started a fight.
To decide on that fateful day,
Who was wrong, and who was right.

Spoke One:

When the angel of hope flies away.
When a shadow is cast over the world,
Blocking all light from the heavens above.
When even Satan bows his head in shame,
As to its master, a dog lame.

When a man comes home, to find it destroyed.
And through the thick of smoke and fire he sees,
His child and wife naught but lifeless forms.
Is he not entitled to hate?
Is his need not dire?

Rose the second in retaliation:

Do they not attack us (Super powers)?
What would you call those suicide bombings?
Killing is brutal, but suicidal murder.
Repugnant to even the vilest of beings.

Those whom you say are harmless,
Are races of deadly terrorists
Determined to slaughter innocent civilians.
We do them naught but justice.

Said the third in rising indignation:

When the wells are filled with blood not water,
When even the mightiest buildings collapse.

When a baby crawls to his mother's side,
Not to find a warm hug, but a lifeless corpse.

Is it justice to let a mother die
Beating at her son's simmering body?
Is it justice to break the deepest bonds of humanity,
For a few nations, the super powers, to live in luxury?

SPRING

Ibreez Shabkhez

Spring
What dost Thou bring?
Merry birds upon thy wing,
What sweet melodies they shall sing!

All winter were the daffodils
Crushed by Nature's power
But once more they shall tower
Upon the Highland Hills

Upon a Glorious April Day,
The children come out to play.
The redbreast finds his mate
And all is ever so gay.

A COMMUNITY CENTER

Hibah Shabkhez

Amid the sky scrapers and plazas that surround and loom over it, the little single storey community centre looks, in spite of its irregular structure, positively delicate and graceful. It is scarcely less busy than them; there is a double row of cars in front of it, and an even greater number of motorcycles. The sounds emerging from within mingle, albeit discordantly, with the mayhem outside.

Laughter. The excited shrieks of the children as they run about, colliding with everyone and everything. The hum of the voices of the adults, the ear-piercing rock music from the 'Teen zone', as well as the noises from the road, pervade the whole building. The only places where there is comparative peace are the reading room, where short-sighted old men sit hunched over their newspapers, and the gym. The gym is, as usual, nearly empty. There are only two people there. A corpulent, middle aged gentleman in a suit far too tight for him, who puffs and pants as he pulls at the straps on the exercise machine, and a boy with dumb bells who is concentrating so hard that he scarcely sees the ludicrous spectacle before him.

However, the 'sports room', a vast, hall like area to which it forms a sort of antechamber, is always crowded. Snooker, chess, card games and video games are generally popular among the boys and men. The older, skilful players are relaxed and cheerful; they exchange jokes and comments, and good-naturedly guide the more nervous youngsters. The women play badminton at a miniature court at one end of the room, or simply wander about, gossiping and laughing while they keep an eye on their children. In general, the atmosphere is one of cordiality and fellowship. Fights do breakout among the children occasionally, but their watchful mothers swiftly intervene and resolve them. The smell of tea, biscuits, crisps and cake is diffused throughout the room, as waiters rush

about serving these to the players. Most of them partake of these as they play.

Across the narrow, crowded lounge, where a large group, made up mostly of the elderly, is intently watching the news, is the teen zone. Some boys dance frenziedly to the music. A group of girls giggles over a fan magazine. Everyone is enjoying themselves. The computers and gaming consoles lined against the walls are crowded. However, most people just sit around talking and laughing, nibbling the refreshments set before them. Considering the volume of the music, it is incredible that they should be able to understand each other at all; but it does not seem to bother them.

Neither, even more surprisingly, does it seem to disturb the knitting circle in the next room, some fifty odd old ladies whose tongues run as unceasingly as their needles. Situated between the 'Play land' designed for toddlers, and the teen zone, they have become habituated to noise.

The 'play land' is full of all sorts of swings, slides and rides designed for two to six year olds. All sorts of toys, from teddy bears to toy dolls and aero planes are also scattered about. There are dozens of children here, along with their mothers, nurses, and in some cases, elder brothers and sisters. Laughing and screaming, squalling and squabbling, they play on happily until their parents decide to leave.

The community centre provides the people of the neighbourhood with a place for recreation and to socialize. In the heart of the city, where there are no public parks or libraries, it is an invaluable institution.

MY MOTHER

Savez Shabkhez

An ode to my mom...

A ray of hope,
A shining light,
A gift of God,
A reassuring sight.

A blessing of heaven,
A comforting face,
A rose pure,
In the world's race.

A blessing Divine,
A sparkling star,
Whose hug takes you,
Into a world afar.

Face aglow,
Smiling sweet,
Helping you,
Stand on your feet.

Comforting us,
When we cry,
Working day and night,
But never a sigh.

To me she is,
Very dear,
With her by my side,
Never fear.

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Write to the authors at hibahshabkhezxicc@gmail.com!

